

## Consider Garden Mums for Fall Color

Fall planting of mums can be successful with a little extra attention to watering and winter protection. To ensure continuing success once your mums are planted, Trees Today Nursery staff recommends the following tips:

**Location:** Choose a spot that gets at least six hours of sun a day. Plants that don't get enough sunlight will be tall and leggy and produce fewer, smaller flowers.

**Soil preparation:** Mums thrive in well-drained soil. Heavy clay soil should be amended. If your yard is soggy after the slightest rain, grow mums in raised beds with friable (soil that crumbles in your hands) for good root growth. If the soil is too dense, add compost and prepare to a depth of 8-12 inches for best performance. Mums' roots are shallow, and they don't like competition.

**Watering:** Water newly planted mums thoroughly, and never let them wilt. After they are established, give mums about an inch of water per week. When bottom leaves look limp or start to turn brown, water more often. Avoid soaking the foliage, which encourages disease.

**Fertilizer:** Plants set out in spring should get fertilized once or twice a month until cooler weather sets in. Use a root stimulator or high-phosphorus fertilizer to stimulate root growth for plants set out in the fall.

**Overwintering:** Prepare mums for winter after the first hard frost. Mulch up to 4 inches with straw or shredded hardwood. Fill in around the entire plant, spreading well between branches. Pinch off dead blooms to clean up the plant, but leave branches intact. Mums have a better chance of surviving if you wait to prune old stems until spring. As soon as the weather warms, pull away mulch to allow new shoots to pop up.

**Dividing:** Mums grown as perennials need to be divided every couple of years. Divide in the spring after the last hard frost and after you see new growth starting. Dig up the plant in one piece and separate outer pieces from the center with a clean sharp spade or large knife. Replant the outer portions into a rejuvenated bed, and discard the original center of the plant.

## Pinching Mums For Better Bloom

The key to those full, rounded domes of blooms that you associate with mums is pinching to create more branching and keep plants compact. Don't hold back--just a few minutes here and there will reward you with a thick, solid-looking plant. If you've bought large, full plants in the fall, then they have already been pinched and you don't need to do anything except plant them. Young spring plants will need pinching for maximum bloom and best plant shape.

Start pinching as soon as you see a good flush of buds. Pinch about half of the tender new growth at the top of the shoot; choose some stems with buds and some without. Repeat the process with every 3 to 5 inches of growth (about every two to four weeks) until July 4. Stopping then ensures you will get good bud formation and blooms in fall.